

Global Governance and Place Making: India, Internationalism and Empire in 1930s London

Abstract

In this paper I argue that two core components of contemporary British human geography curricula (global governance and place making) can and should be taught together. I also argue that materials from the past provide valuable teaching tools in the present. As such, this paper also makes the case for historical geography. It does this through examining historical phases of what is now called globalisation. It introduces geographical perspectives on imperialism and internationalism, two variants of interwar, modern globalisation. It introduces India as a key site in British history, but argues that we can understand large scale processes like globalisation through small sites of place-making, such as international conferences. The Round Table Conference of 1930-32, during which Indian leaders came to London, is presented as an example of a space and time in which place-making and global governance came together.

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Historical geographers have built up a substantial body of work teasing out the histories behind the globalised world we have inherited. It emphasises the networks that connect the world (of trade, migration, data, and ideas) and the nodes at which these networks coalesce (in ports, mines, camps, and cities). Such work has drawn upon substantial research in other disciplines. The sociologist Saskia Sassen, author of the widely cited classic *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Sassen, 1991), has more recently turned to an exploration of the way in which our current, global world draws upon ways of assembling together *Territory, Authority, Rights* (Sassen, 2006) in ways which can only be understood through their bases in medieval and early-modern precedents.

In thinking about geography and empire, we have a large amount of scholarship to draw upon which provokes us to think about globalisation, empire, history and geography together in complex ways. In this paper I will draw upon research arising out of a research project entitled “Conferencing the International: A Cultural and Historical Geography of the Origins of Internationalism, 1919-1939”.¹ In response to the aggressive nationalism behind the Great War of 1914-18, many argued that *internationalism* held the key to lasting peace. In the project Professor Mike Heffernan, Dr Jake Hodder and myself argue that this political and social shift was also a deeply geographical one, based on the belief that international connections could foster greater understanding of humanity’s shared interests. We also argue that this internationalist turn allowed new visions of the world’s geography to emerge, in which white men might not be the sole deciders of that world’s fate.

The geography of internationalism is often perceived as global. However, at the core of our methodology is the insistence that the spaces through which we study geographical phenomenon need not match their scale. Instead, we argue that interwar forms of internationalisms only became manifest when people came together to debate and plan

¹ For more information please see <https://researchfeatures.com/2017/11/30/origin-internationalism-1919-1939-beyond/>.

them and that the main space in which this happened was that of the international conference. As such, we investigate internationalism through the buildings and cities which periodically hosted dozens, hundreds even, of delegates who came together to discuss these new political visions for the planet. This approach draws upon debates in geography regarding scale and place, as well as from within International Relations regarding the role of individual's 'performances' of their political roles (Hodder, et al., 2015).

In this paper I would like to make two arguments that will speak to school geography, where key elements in both GCSE and A level examination specifications focus on the international scale (such a globalisation, global governance, global systems and global connections) and 'place' (such as place representation, regeneration of places and diverse places). The first argument is that the two foci (globalisation and place) can, and should, be productively taught together. The second is that an historical perspective presents to us teaching tools with which to help school students understand the complex ways in which scales intermesh, and in which daunting abstractions like globalisation are made real, and lived. In this sense the paper passionately advocates the value of historical geography in supporting geography students' learning: a key concept such as globalisation makes more sense when rooted in historical geographical contexts. Historical geography is more than geographers simply 'doing' history! Historical geographers examine the past with an eye for the connections between places, the role of boundaries and borders, the significance of representations of past spaces (see the maps below) and the role of the environment in directing the course of history.

While not a strong component of GCSE or A'Level teaching in the UK, Felix Driver (2013) has made the case for the strength of the historical geography sub-discipline at British universities, and has listed some of the themes which we have studied, including: geography, science and technology; historical geographies of environment; maps, print and visual culture; and historical GIS. Tellingly, perhaps, the first two themes in Driver's list were 'global historical geographies' and 'geography and empire'.

Historical Geographies of Globalisation

The economic historian AG Hopkins (2003), has suggested that there were four phases of globalisation:

1. Archaic globalisation (up to 1648/1760): marked by Islamic, African, Chinese, Asian and, later, European networks that cooperated with, rather than assimilated, each other.
2. Proto-globalisation (1648/1760-1850): marked by the rise of sovereign states, recognised in international law, in the context of developing commerce, finance and early industrialization.
3. Modern, or imperial, globalisation (1850-1950): marked by nation-states exporting financial and industrial revolutions to the non-European world.
4. Post-colonial globalisation (1950 to present): marked by increasingly intense transactions between Europe, America and Asia.

Whilst historians and historical geographers have produced rich work across all of these periods, the third phase (modern) has perhaps too quickly been assumed to be that solely of the 'imperial'. The world-making force of imperialism cannot, of course, be denied, but in this paper I would like to suggest that we also pay attention to the forces of internationalism that characterised (and hastened) the end of this period.

Imperial globalisation

The period of what Hopkins terms modern globalisation was undoubtedly marked by the rapid expansion of imperial geographies. The 'Scramble for Africa' by European colonial powers had been adjudicated at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, during which the continent was carved up between the great colonial powers, including France, Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire. Through conferences such as these the British Empire extended the reach of its colonial possessions, edging closer to its geographical fantasy of a 'Cape to Cairo' stretch of African territory from the Mediterranean to the Cape of Good Hope (a fantasy fulfilled when Britain secured trusteeship of Tanganyika as a Mandate after the First World War, see below). Britain also used imperial conferences to coordinate the activities of its 'Dominions', the white

settler colonies of Canada (and Newfoundland), South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The disparate collection of dominions, colonies and sub-empires constituted the British Empire, which in *The Cambridge Modern History Atlas* of 1912 was depicted in vibrant pink (see figure 1, and for an introduction to postcolonialism and geography see Jazeel 2012a).

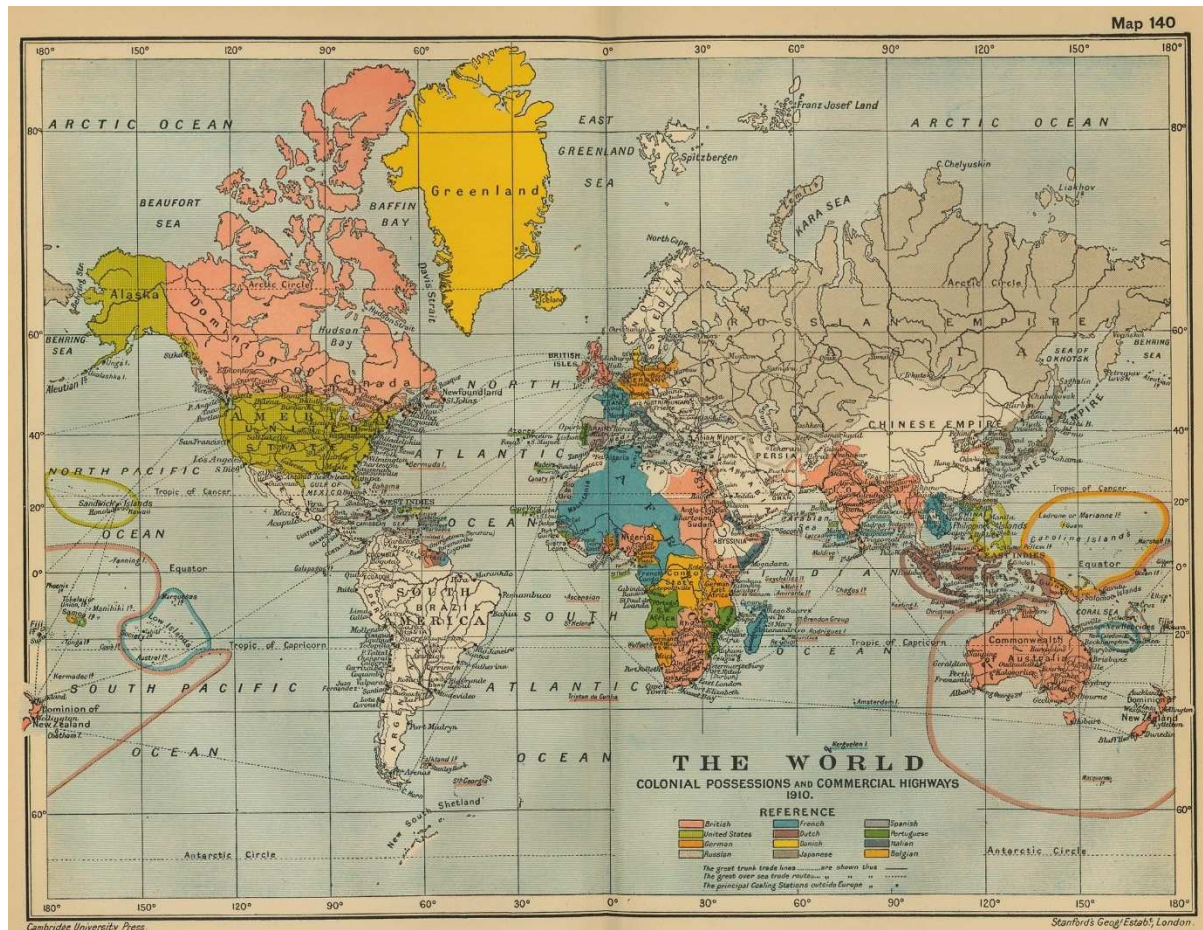


Figure 1. The World: Colonial Possessions and Commercial Highways, 1910²

What makes this map particularly useful is its depiction of a world almost wholly divided up into the possessions of European powers. Apart from ex-European colonies in South and Central America, only the Arabian and Chinese blank swathes would fully resist European ownership, while the USA was the only ex-European colony to transition to the status here of coloniser (the Philippines). The Mercator projection distortions make the

² From (Ward, et al., 1912) map 140. With thanks to University of Texas Libraries for this reproduction (https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/ward_1912/world_1910.jpg).

picture even more complicated, with the Danish possession of Greenland approximating the size of Africa (in reality it is c.1/14th the size).

The map also includes many other distortions and omissions. The standardised pink of the British Empire airbrushes out the hues and tones within the imperial collective. It also only charts formal, colonial acquisitions, not the zones of imperial influence through which a state's independence could be undermined through influence and coercion (such as through British policies in Argentina, the Ottoman Empire or coastal China). The map was also very much of its time; this is the pre-War world. After it, many territorial shifts would take place, including the loss by Germany of its colonies and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. While other national boundaries stayed the same, the nature of the nations within underwent phenomenal change, such as through the nationalist upsurges in India, Vietnam and Egypt. And, finally, the post-war world saw the emergence of international institutions which surpassed the scope of Empires in terms of their reach, even if they did not surpass the influence and coercion of imperial power.

International globalisation

Throughout the nineteenth century, international organisations had emerged which sought technical and scientific coordination so as to face the challenges of the modern world, such as telegraph and postal communications or the sanitary health of seamen. They came to sit alongside traditional diplomatic congresses which had sought to mediate international tensions between nations and empires (Mazower, 2012). Building upon both of these traditions, an international institution emerged out of the ashes of the First World War. Its primary aim was peace and it would pursue this aim through the fostering of cooperation, international legislation, and learning between its member states through an international League of Nations. The League was born out of agreements reached at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the resulting Treaty of Versailles. It has been a staple of historical scholarship and teaching ever since and it operates under a condemnatory sign of *failure*. The American President, Woodrow Wilson, who pushed for the creation of the League failed to gain support for it in the USA. Germany was allowed to join the League in 1926 but left in 1933, while the USSR only gained admittance to the League in 1934 (and was expelled in 1939). Most

damningly of all, of course, was the outbreak of a Second World War in 1939, marking the signal failure of the League's core aim.

Recent scholarship is, however, reassessing the League's achievements as a brave proponent of a new internationalism that sought to heal the wounds of the nationalist and imperialist First World War. It created the world's largest yet political union; a bold new form of internationalist globalisation. Cartographically it surpassed the swathes of pink or blue on the 1910 colonial map, even with the stark white omissions of the USA, Brazil, the USSR and other countries on the League's own 1929 map (figure 2). Its technical and social questions divisions achieved long-lasting international cooperation regarding campaigns regarding trafficking, refugees, signage, disease and labourer rights. It presented a forum in which smaller nations could challenge the ambitions of larger imperial powers, enabling dialogue between Euro-American powers and those of South America, Africa and Asia. Notably, it held France and Britain to account over their trusteeship of their 'Mandates'. These were ex-colonies of possessions of Germany and the Ottoman Empire which they had ceded as a result of the Paris Peace Conference.

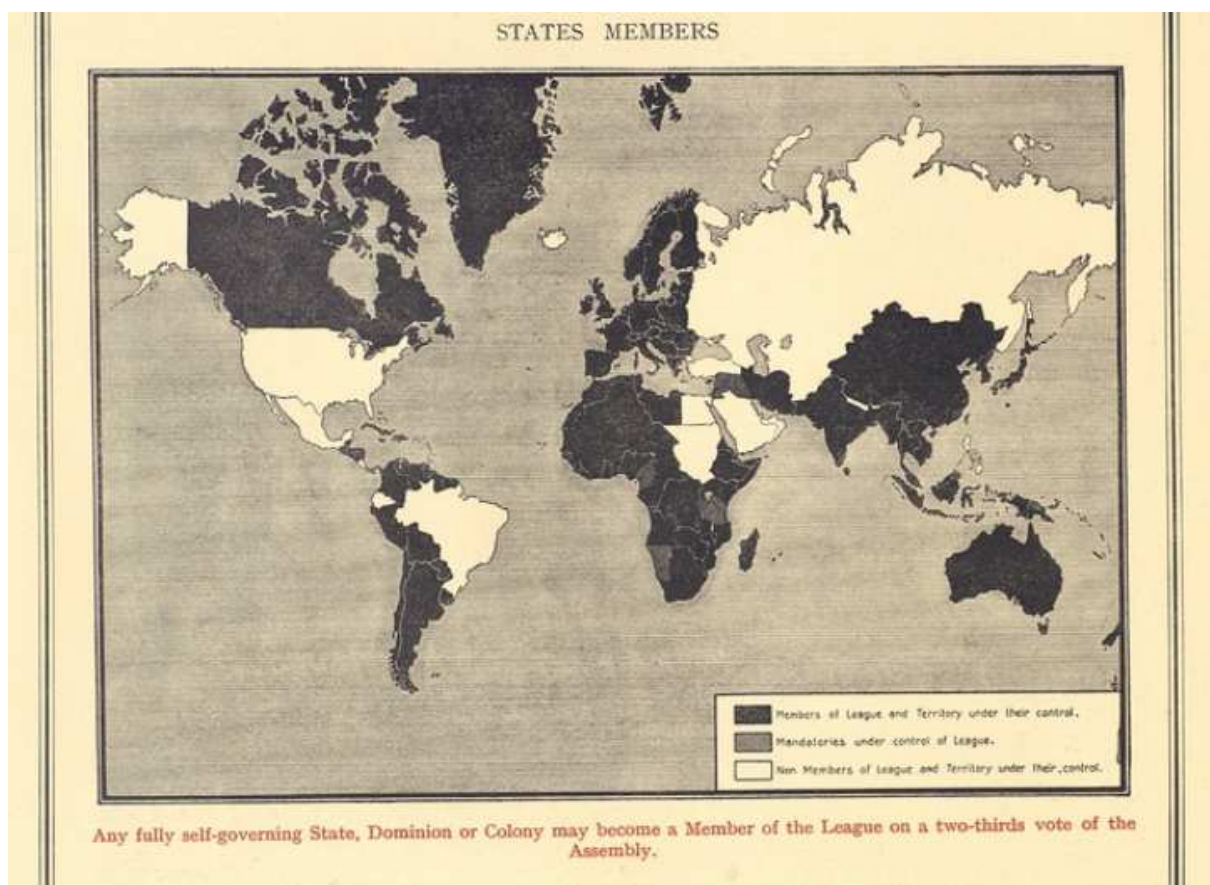


Figure 2. League of Nations State Members (1929).³

In figure 2 the mandates are just visible, shaded in a dark grey, next to the black territory of League Members and their Dependencies (on the latter, see below), in the Middle East, Africa, and the Pacific. But the way in which the mandates were administered has given pause for thought over the differences between internationalist and imperialist forms of globalisation. The mandates were divided into three categories, which explicitly referenced colonialist assumptions about the civilizational development of the inhabitants and their capacity for self-rule:

- ‘A Mandates’: requiring only administrative advice and assistance (including Syria, Iraq, and Palestine)
- ‘B Mandates’: administered by the mandatory power to guarantee the “welfare of the natives” (including Tanganyika, Ruana-Urundi, Kamerun, and Togoland).
- ‘C Mandates’: administered by the mandatory power as part of its territory (including New Guinea, German Samoa and Nauru in the Pacific, and South West Africa).

For many of the inhabitants of these lands, mandates internationalism felt much like colonial imperialism (Pedersen, 2015). Likewise, for members of the communist USSR, the League would have felt like a capitalist club of old Empire states, for whom supposedly humanitarian internationalism was merely a cloak for the expansion of western industry and commerce. But perhaps the starkest illustration of the complicity of imperial and internationalist forms of globalisation within the League of Nations can be illustrated by reading the distortions, omissions and half-references in the League’s own 1929 map.

The map legend denotes black-shaded territories as “members of the League and territories under their control”. What this means is that when the great imperial powers signed the Treaty of Versailles and became founding members of the League of Nations, they also signed up all their colonial possessions as “dependencies”. As such, the black, grey and white of the League map actually represents a monochrome and even more

³ From League of Nations (1929) *The League of Nations: A Pictorial Survey* League of Nations Secretariat, Information Section, Geneva, pg8 <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/11589/>.

totalising view of the world than the 1910 map. Britain's pink, France's blue, Belgium's orange and Portugal's green in Africa and beyond were all homogenised into an international black. This black-washing of the colonial geography of the world was exposed in a map of 1927, published in a League of Nations textbook for teachers in South Asia (figure 3, from Hall and Sen, 1927). Here Greenland, Iceland, most of Africa and much of South-East Asia appear as dependencies. So too does Ceylon, off the south-east of India. India itself, however, stands in bright yellow. A member state, not a dependency. The legend of the League map makes this anomaly clear, reminding the world that only fully self-governing states, colonies or dominions could apply for League full membership. India was neither.

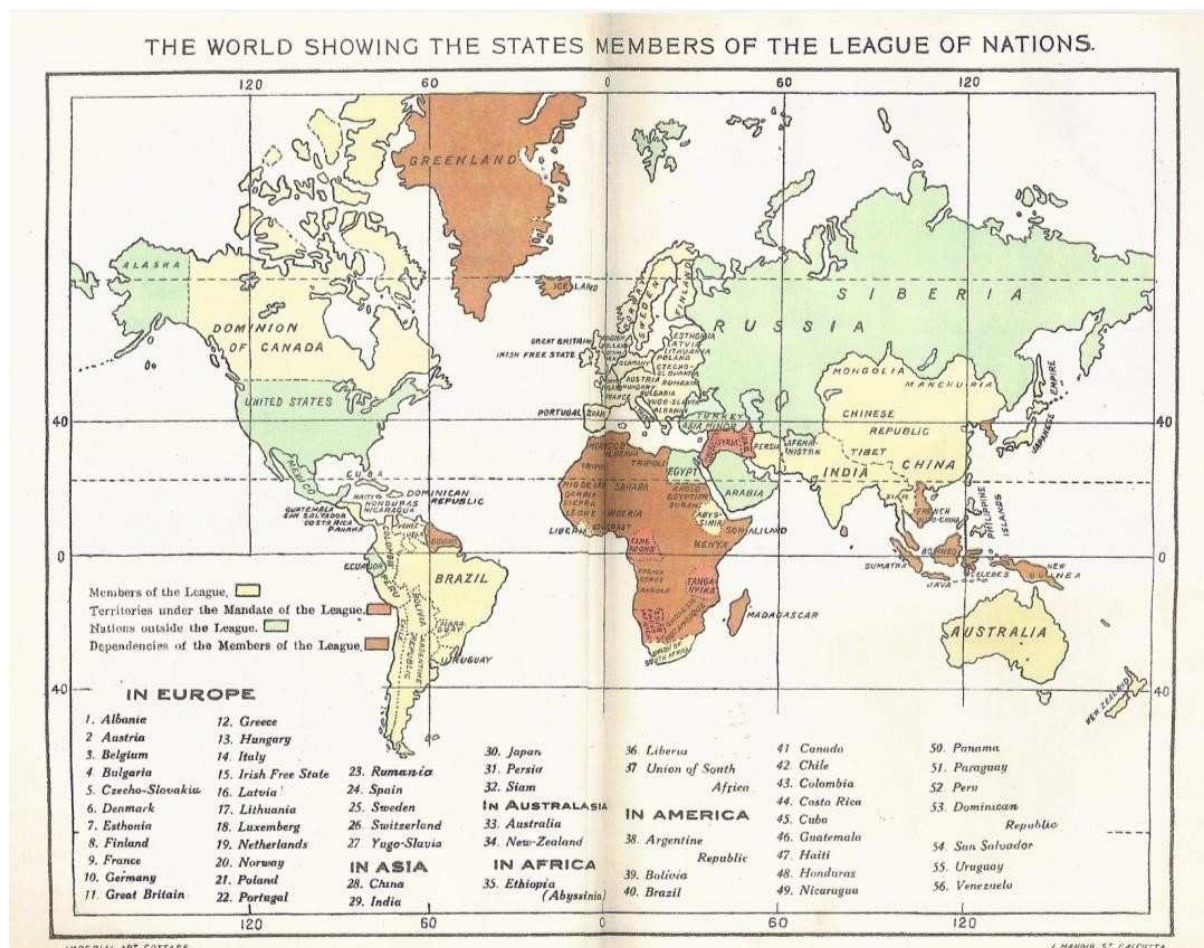


Figure 3. The World showing the States Members of the League of Nations.

India: Empire-Colony, Superpower, Rebel

India was, and is, famously known as the ‘Jewel in the Crown’ of the British Empire. It was its biggest, richest, and most strategic possession. That is where the consensus ends! Notably, India was not technically a colony (which were represented by the Colonial Secretary in London). It was an empire within the British Empire (represented directly in Downing Street’s Cabinet by the Secretary of State for India). And this was more than a constitutional technicality. India dominated the Indian Ocean Arena. Its traders, engineers, investors, administrators, architects and soldiers were sought after and found from South Africa and the east African coastal states to the Middle East and Burma, and through South-East Asia to Hong Kong and Shanghai. Although part of the British Empire, it could rightly (if retrospectively) claim to have been an Asian superpower.

Britain penetrated and came to govern this superpower not initially through conquest or exploration, but through early seventeenth-century traders seeking access to the vast wealth of the Mughal Empire’s markets. The East India Company gradually extended its influence from the port towns it came to dominate (Bombay, Madras and Calcutta) upstream, taking on the form of a colonial state. Its increasingly aggressive reforms led to growing discontent, which manifested itself in a great uprising of 1857. Labelled by the British as a “Sepoy [army subordinate] Mutiny”, many Indians came to know it as “The First War of Independence”. This rebellion, the largest yet against the British Empire, was viciously put down and Indian political agitation took more conciliatory forms in the following years, after the East India Company was disbanded and the Government of India created in 1858. In 1919-20, 1930-32 and 1942-44 India would once again rebel against its imperial overlords. The sparking of these rebellions can only be understood through the context of India’s yellow in figure 3; the internationalist framing for its nationalist awakening.

India’s activities in the India Ocean Arena, and beyond, had made it party to many of the large international technical and scientific conventions of the nineteenth-century. It had never, however, been admitted to the white men’s club diplomatic congresses which oversaw the political coordination of the world in general, and the British Empire in specific. The First World War changed all this. India contributed an estimated one million troops overseas to the war effort, which led to demands for international recognition. As

a result it was admitted to the Imperial Conference of 1917, alongside representatives of Britain and the white settler dominions. It went on to attend the Imperial War Cabinet of 1918, and the Peace Conference of 1919. As a signatory of the Versailles Treaty it became a founding member of the League of Nations. Because all future members would need to be self-governing, it remained the one and only non-self-governing member (Legg, 2014).

Rather than placating India's would-be rebels, this international status only seemed to heighten the contrast with the oppressive colonial rule at home. The anti-colonial nationalist Indian National Congress pushed for greater reforms than those delivered by the 1919 Government of India Act and for the suspension of repressive war time legislation. When they did not come a non-cooperation movement was launched under the inspiration leadership of 'Mahatma' Gandhi. Unable to guarantee the non-violence of his followers, Gandhi suspended the movement in 1922. Growing frustration at the slow pace of Indian reforms mounted in the 1920s, which government inquiries did little to quell. As a result, the British Government announced that in 1930 Indian leaders would be invited to London for a 'Round Table Conference' to discuss India's future. Congress leaders demanded Dominion Status, meaning self-government and a degree of international autonomy, which the British resisted. The conference was a key moment in the history of Britain as a global power and raised questions about India's future as an international player, while in the process changing the way in which London functioned as a node within networks of modern (imperial and international) globalisation.

The Round Table Conference: Imperialism, Internationalism, and Place

The Round Table Conference sat in three sittings: 12th November 1930- 19th January 1931, 7th September-1st December 1931, and 17th November to 24th December 1932. In protest at British refusal to consider the question of complete self-rule, Congress boycotted the first and third meeting, though Gandhi and a small band of staff attended the second. The conference was simultaneously a local and a global event. I will discuss below how we consider its internationalism, but we must also recognise the significance of place (for postcolonial reflections on place making see Jazeel 2012b). London was an imperial and national capital, to which the very invitation of Indian leaders was exceptional and a recognition of India's outstanding importance to the Empire. The conference was

opened by King-Emperor George V, who in his opening speech recollected visiting India in 1911 (the only ruling British monarch ever to do so) and welcoming some of the Indian leaders he had known since then into British soil.

The conference was conducted in St James's Palace but was opened in the Palace of Westminster, where the delegates witnessed the full spectacle of British sovereignty. Before and during the opening of the conference delegates were treated to dinners in London's finest hotels, trips to scientific exhibitions, visits to an airshow at Croydon, and an evening reception at Kensington's Imperial Institute. Regular delegates received funding to support their hotel accommodation, while many of the 'Ruling Princes' used their vast wealth to book suites at London's best hotels (the Ritz, Carlton and Savoy).

The tabloid press went wild for the delegates, especially the Princes, with their dazzling jewellery, extravagant spending habits, and their impeccable English (see figure 4). When Gandhi arrived in late 1931 his global superstardom guaranteed a level of attention that put all others in the shade. Pointedly refusing the official subsidy for his housing needs, he lodged in the East End with London's poor in a missionary hall. While these decidedly local details may seem superficial or incidental, what the delegates did outside the conference venue decidedly impacted upon their work within. Gandhi's celebrity gave his interventions added weight; gossip shared at cocktail parties and at Lyon's teahouses forged alliances and divided loyalties; while the accumulative force of Westminster splendour contributed, over the months, to dulling the rebellious edge of delegates and pushing them closer to conciliatory compromise. The conference was marked by compromise, especially for those who were hoping that India would attain "dominion" status. Early on the consensus was reached that the aim of the conference would be to create a federal India, focusing attention on restructuring its internal state structure, not looking out on India's international standing.

British Indians and Indian States, to all intents and purposes, present the appearance of a united and self-governing India to the outer world in regard to transactions connected, for instance, with the League of Nations, with the Imperial Conference..." (India, 1932, 17). Others, however, were scathing of India's treatment at the international scale. Gandhi's colleague Madan Mahan Malaviya commented of India's membership of the League: "One would imagine that, after such utterances, India would be placed on a footing of equality with the self-governing Dominions of the British Empire. India was indeed made an original Member of the League of Nations, but that was a sort of comedy that, not having freedom to govern itself, India should be called on to take part in the discussion and decision of affairs affecting the freedom of other countries" (India, 1932, 48). Whilst Malaviya spoke from the tradition of India as rebel, another delegate anticipated India's role as global superpower. At the first sitting of the conference, labour representative NM Joshi suggested that:

"The tendency to find an international solution to our difficulties is naturally, and very properly, growing and occupying a wide sphere, and I hope that our Constitution will be so framed in this Conference that India, as a whole, will be able to take full benefit of the international action, and India, as a whole, will also be able to be helpful in the international solution of the difficulties of the world." (India, 1931, 105)

Conclusions

After independence in 1947 independent India would strive to reconcile its dual positions as rebel and superpower. At the 1955 Bandung conference in Java India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, positioned the country as a rebel superpower, leading other newly independent African and Asian nations in the fight to remain non-aligned to either side of the Cold War. From imperial London to anti-imperial Bandung, conferences present us with sites in which to see how internationalism and place, the global and the local, make each other and remake the world. This is a process as prevalent today as ever, whether in UN debates about nuclear disarmament, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scientific debates, on UK-EU debates about the shape and consequences of 'Brexit'. I hope the examples here outlined have provided some new ways of thinking about global

governance and changing places together, and of valuing the contribution of historical geography to the teaching of geography today.⁵

⁵ To learn more about our ongoing research please see <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/interwarconferencing/>.

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